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## ABSTRACT

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Communicating About Communication:  
Fostering the Development of the Communication Discipline in Russia

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Despite American domination of the social science study of communication, communication instruction is growing throughout the world. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, American scholars initiated activities to introduce Russian scholars to the communication discipline. This paper explores that journey by describing the history of the study of communication in Russia prior to its American introduction, and the current state of communication as a discipline in Russia. The exploration is completed with a review of contemporary studies of Russian-American intercultural communication and what is known of Russian communication practices through studies conducted by scholars of communication-related disciplines. The paper concludes with an agenda for research and teaching of communication in Russia and the role of American scholars in its development.

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Considering their position relative to that of social scientists in other parts of the world, there are more researchers in the United States with access to more research producing the bulk of scholarly books and articles. As a result, they influence scholars in other parts of the world with their methodologies, theoretical development, and intensity of intellectual debates (Tishkov et al, 1998). With respect to the social science study of communication, Americans are perceived as the communication experts if one considers the number of international students in our graduate programs.

Despite American domination of the discipline, communication instruction is growing throughout the world (Beebe, Kharcheva & Kharcheva, 1998). We wonder, however, about the successful translation of such a American convention to other cultures. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, American scholars initiated activities to introduce Russian scholars to the communication discipline. This paper explores that journey by describing the history of the study of communication in Russia prior to its American introduction, and the current state of communication as a discipline in Russia. The exploration is completed with a review of contemporary studies of Russian-American intercultural communication and what is known of Russian communication practices through studies conducted by scholars of communication-related disciplines. The paper concludes with an agenda for research and teaching of communication in Russia and the role of American scholars in its development. Our interest in linking American and Russian scholars is propelled by the frustration of the first author who, being of Russian nationality and a doctoral student in communication, is acutely aware of how

much the Russian people have missed by not having the communication discipline as part of their educational curriculum. Secondly, our interest is further propelled by the way in which American scholars have viewed and (sometimes) (mis)conceptualized Russian communication. We pay particular attention to those research articles that are based on empirical research, believing that some lessons about how to help Russian scholars develop an interest in the communication discipline is embedded in their findings.

Communication scholars are not the only ones who are interested in Russian-American communication. Indeed many others view this particular intercultural communication context as inviting and opportunistic since there is considerable money to be made by American businesses entering previously untapped markets. In addition to the economic transformation, Russia's newly opened society is encouraging greater cultural and educational exchanges.

#### History of Communication in Russia

To start we need to emphasize that communication is a new and not clearly defined concept in Russian social science. Different social disciplines (sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, management, and psychology) are attempting to set boundaries for communication as distinct from and as a corollary to their own disciplines. However, all of these disciplines do not have a coherent and common model for their understanding and research of communication.

A primary problem of translation explains the difficulty in transporting the study of communication to Russia. In the Soviet period communication was largely understood as an act or means of communicating (e.g., telephone communications, satellite communications) and transportation routes (e.g., railway communications). The word "kommunikatsiya" (or communications) was primarily used in its plural form (Katzner, 1994). The Russian word that has the same connotation of the American usage of communication is "obsheniye." However, in

the English-Russian, Russian-English dictionary (Katzner, 1994) the translation of this Russian word into English is limited to "contact."

Contemporary Russian scholars use both terms, kommunikatsiya and obsheniye, to refer to the American conceptualization of communication. Frankly, it is not clear why Russian scholars use the word kommunikatsiya in its unnatural context. We can hypothesize that the word kommunikatsiya repeated the history of other American words such as killer and management. These words were transferred to Russian language as calques, in that specialized terms can be borrowed from one language and transferred to another by literal translation. Although, Russian language has its own words for the meanings associated with killer and management, "kiler" and "menagment" are both broadly used in Russian conversations. These two words, however, do not produce as much confusion as the word kommunikatsiya because the meaning that was fixed in the word obsheniye (communication) was assigned to a different word kommunikatsiya (communications). Ease of communicating between two languages probably produced the Russian usage without thought to Russians who still actively use kommunikatsiya to refer to means of communicating and transportation. Those who introduced the terminology and their meanings were probably unaware that they were giving birth to another meaning of the word. Information flow and attitudes toward social research in Soviet Union are secondary problems in transferring the social science study of communication to Russia.

#### Freedom of Information

The Soviet empire was planned and controlled by the communist elite . It was a society in which the Communist Party released information to its people only if it served the function of maintaining the communist image. Criticism was largely directed toward the individual, never toward the Communist Party itself (Morrison, 1997; Pehowski, 1978). As a result, there was not

a free flow of information to or about Russian citizens in newspapers and TV programs. This one-way transmission of controlled information was also prevalent in the life of the Soviet people, particularly in their communication within organizations.

Pehowski (1978) identified three major problems that hindered freedom of information in the Soviet society. The first problem was the news standard. Soviet citizens were told in the press only what they needed to know to become productive members of a Communist state. The state's bureaucracy produced the information; the press was a simple conveyor of information. The second problem was Russians' limited access to the world news. World news was accessible only to the government and military leaders of the communist elite. The international news that was transmitted to Soviet people served as propaganda. "The fact that the Communist news organizations regularly quote the democratic news sources does not necessarily [indicate] accurate reporting. News out of context can provide useful propaganda"(Pehowski, 1978, p.8-9). The third problem was the official, unofficial, and self-imposed censorship (Pehowski). All interviews suffered because journalists were afraid to ask anything that might reveal some negative aspect of the Communist Party. Even if asked for their opinion, respondents were unwilling to present their point of views if they were not in accord with the official ideology (Morrison, 1997; Pehowski, 1978).

We can identify one more problem that hindered freedom of information. In the Soviet period (1917-1991) journalists in the USSR were trained to serve the State. All working journalists were obligated to receive training in Marxism-Leninism at various institutes in the Soviet Union (Morrison, 1997). As a result, journalism was ideologically oriented. Simply, journalists were trained not to question, but to inform. Morrison (1997) states, "Under the Soviet theory of the press, the media was an arm of the state, never to question, always to promote" (p.

26). Thus, a no-arguments environment was created and sustained. Moreover, the Soviet people had little trust in the media as they had no avenue to express their opinions publicly.

Consequently, freedom of information did not exist in Soviet Russia, as the opinions of Soviet citizens were not pursued. Likewise, public opinion research did not exist in the Soviet Union. Young (1999), admits, that "in the society where there is supposed to be unanimity of public opinion, there is not reason to sample that opinion" (p. 146). Personal opinions were rarely communicated and only in the most secure circumstances (at home with close friends) (Wyman, 1997; Young, 1999). The Soviet government created an atmosphere of distrust about the process of opinion polling. According to Wyman (1997), "Although some interesting research was conducted, all surveys were unrepresentative of the population as a whole, and restricted to non-controversial themes. The quality of data analysis was unsophisticated, results were not widely published, and, if controversial, were not published at all" (Wyman, 1997, p.5). According to Buckley (1998), data from public surveys were often "either manipulated, massaged, suppressed, or simply not collected" (p. 223). It is no wonder, then, that Soviet society became distrustful of the process of people asking questions and distrustful of information presented to them. Wyman (1997) documents that people refused to participate in surveys because of their suspiciousness to questions and the questioners.

With this history it is understandable that Soviet educational curriculums did not include disciplines that depend on collecting data and information from people and then using that data as an expression of opinions about them. Government authorities essentially limited use of these practices. However, some social sciences, particularly sociology, did exist prior to and during the Soviet regime (Buckley, 1998), setting the base and background for developments in the post-Soviet period (Iadov, 1996; Kukushkina, 1993; Medushevskii, 1993; Shlapentokh, 1987).

Although small-scale surveys were conducted within factories in the 1920s, and large-scale public opinion surveys were first distributed with the newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda* in the 1950s, Soviet researchers faced difficulties in obtaining official government permission on other topics.

The collapse of the Soviet empire allowed Russian people for the first time in 73 years to express themselves and talk directly about their communist past. The Russian public responded to the transformation with a flood of talk publicly and privately. Communication took on a past-orientation as learning information, which was previously restricted, became their priority (Mickiewicz, 1997). Since 1991, the flow of news and information has increased substantially as top leaders are interviewed, official records can be accessed, and citizens are allowed greater freedom to travel outside of the country. In addition, Gorbachev's goal for the government was to inform the public of social situations. This information openness led to a rapid expansion of survey research, public opinion polling, and economic monitoring (Buckley, 1998).

#### Research Methodology

Since the Soviet collapse, survey research has been growing dramatically. More than 500 professional monitoring and marketing firms has been developed in Russia, ranging from large-scale survey firms, such as VoxPopuli and VTsIOM, that employ highly trained scientists to smaller scale and more informal groups. However, a lack of standardized reporting practices and the poor quality of surveys has led to continued suspicion regarding public opinion data from Russia (Buckley, 1998).

As documented by Nikolaev and Goregin (1995), the transition of government and culture affected what constituted mass media as communication systems and the roles media and public relations professionals could assume in Russian society. Russians are finding that the

current reformed commercial structure (and openness to the rest of the world) requires different research and media capabilities than allowed by the previous Soviet government structure.

Several factors impeded the development of survey methodology in the USSR (Buckley, 1998). First, there was a lack of communication between social scientists from the East and West. This separation has led to two independent methodological discussions. The path of methodology advancement is different for basic issues of sampling, questionnaire design, and interviewing. Second, Russian ideology supported the general belief that mathematics and complex modeling had no place in social science. Thus, methodological development from Western survey techniques is not present in Russian research. Third, survey development and sampling suffered from the influence of communist ideology. Buckley (1998) and Wyman (1997) admit that all questionnaire-based research suffered from the problem of self-censorship. "Scholars were reluctant to ask anything that might achieve political awkward results, and respondents were unwilling to admit to views that were not in accord with the official line," reports Wyman (1997, p. 5).

#### Communication in Russia Today

As a result of this history, communication in Russia is often viewed as public relations, journalism, or public opinion research. Even these fields are quite new. As late as 1994, public relations (PR) was not recognized as a profession. Since that time, professional organizations (Professional Communicators Guild of Russia and Saint-Petersburg Association of Public Relations Specialists) have developed with the goals of recognizing the profession, designing a curriculum for professional education, and creating professional standards for what it means to be a public relation specialist.

The first Public Relations Association in Russia (RPRA) formed in 1990 by professional Russian communicators, some with academic affiliation. They promoted free speech, free press, free enterprise, free elections, and informed public opinion. Thus, public opinion is still a new element in Russian society (Clarke, 2000; Nikolaev & Goregin, 1995). Presently, RPRA promotes a close and active relationship with higher education. The organization admits that this linkage is significant in order to educate citizens in how to be critical and active participants in Russian society, and to inculcate professional ethics and standards of practice (Clarke, 2000; Nikolaev & Goregin, 1995). RPRA sees the real task of communication is to create a genuine public dialogue. As a result of RPRA activities, a growing number of university departments offer courses in PR.

This bit of history demonstrates that the Russian development of the discipline of communication with its emphasis on public dialogue may obscure development of other aspects of the communication discipline there. Nikolaev and Goregin (1995) reported that in 1993 Russians working in public relations associated PR with advertising; few were able to distinguish the two. Of course, naming the professional association the Professional Communicators Guild of Russia also serves to associate the communication discipline with public relations. Recall our earlier analysis of the translation of the word communication. In Russia today, communication is more commonly associated with mediated communication and public information.

The only known survey of Russian professors of higher education indicates that, indeed, journalism is more commonly associated with communication than any other aspect of our discipline (Beebe, Kharcheva, & Kharcheva, 1998). The survey further revealed that professors were generally not aware of communication as a department or field of study, which was described on the survey as practiced in the United States. Slightly more than one-third of the

respondents strongly agreed that such a department should be included in the Russian educational curriculum whereas 40% disagreed with its inclusion. Survey respondents also reported that the best way to introduce such course offerings were through Russian professors customizing course for Russians students rather than simply importing Western curriculum. Only 13% reported that Western-style classes should be taught. Responding to a query of who should teach such classes, 41% of the respondents indicated that U.S. professors should be the instructors, whereas 30% indicated that Russian professors from related disciplines should teach the courses. Another 29% reported that Russian professors should be educated in the U.S. and then return to Russia to teach the courses.

Russian professors were also asked to identify the importance of typical U.S. communication course offerings (Beebe, Kharcheva, & Kharcheva, 1998). The five most highly rated U.S. courses (in order) were Family Communication, Business and Professional Speaking, Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Rhetoric and Public Address. In addressing the skill component of communication coursework, the Russian professors overwhelmingly agreed that speech communication knowledge and skills would help Russian graduates obtain employment. Yet, in asking the professors to comparatively rate communication skill with other factors, communication skills ranked 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in helping college graduates obtain employment and in successful job performance. This is in stark contrast to the commonly reported top three placement of communication skills when U.S. managers are asked to indicate which characteristics they most seek in new employees. We should note, however, that one reason Russian professors may have rated this skill so low is the prevalence of oral examinations at all levels of educational institutions. Typically, Russian professors examine students through oral presentations rather than relying on written examinations.

How do Russians view their own communication and interaction style? Christophel's (1996) cross-cultural study revealed that Russian students perceived themselves as having low communication competence—lower than most of the cultures studied. Their levels of introversion were high while their levels of unwillingness to communicate were low. Not only were there differences among cultures, significant differences between Russian men and women were also revealed.

#### Creating a Community for the Study of Russian Communication

Today, communication in Russia is viewed mostly as a part of the study of linguistics. There is a limited number of specialized departments of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication (Moscow State University, Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, Tver State University). Moscow State University was one of the first to open a Chair of Theory and Practice of Speech Communication in its department of Foreign Languages and International Communication. This department provides courses in rhetoric, mass communication, public relations, lexicography, sociolinguistics, language and business, and language and education.

Other universities (Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, Tver State University) offer degrees in Linguistics with the concentration in translation and intercultural communication. Voronezh State University has had a Department of General Linguistics and Stylistics since 1918. Professors lecture on basic theoretical linguistic courses. Recently, they started training students in communicative subjects such as practical stylistics, culture of speech, rhetoric, and declamation. Specialized courses include: models of language in modern linguistics, contrastive linguistics, the language and

thinking, the language and society, theory of metaphor, the basics of psycholinguistics, the basics of pragmalinguistics, rhetoric, and speech impact.

From the newsletter published by the Russian Communication Association we learned that some Russian professors, particularly those in the Philological fields, argue that there is a need to limit the study of communication to the study of language and linguistics. Other Russian disciplines explore communication subjects tangentially include Culturalogy (Culture Study as a part of Philosophy) and Country Study (Stranovedenie). Likewise, there are several business departments (for example, in Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University) that study business communication. However, most of these studies are limited to the skill-training practices. Moscow State Engineering and Physical University offers on-line courses in "Art of Business Communication." (The description of this course is available on World Wide Web: <http://www.mifi.ru/manager-artcontact-lesson-1.htm>.)

In universities, the phrase "international communication" is broadly used to represent connections between researchers of different disciplines and nationalities who cooperate to work on joint projects. In 1998, the Center of International Communication was opened in Moscow State University. This center includes professionals from history, linguistics, sociology, literature, and philosophy. One of the main goals of this organization is establishing connections between East and West.

Rostov State University has the department most like that of American social science communication departments. Its Department of Social and Personality Psychology provides training in the psychology of nonverbal communication, and the motivational and cognitive aspects of communication.

The Russian Communication Association, established in 2000, may provide opportunities for communication studies in Russia to flourish beyond the efforts of a few universities and individuals, and the current focus on mediated communication and public information. The fundamental objective of the Russian Communication Association is to unite American scholars that study Russian communication with Russian researchers. The main goals of this organization are to improve communication research methodology in Russia, help to develop communication departments in Russia, and educate Russians about the importance of communication knowledge. The first RCA-NCA Communication Conference will be held in June 2002 in Pyatigorsk, Russia. This will be a first step in providing the opportunity for Russian scholars interested in communication to meet and discuss their understanding of communication with American scholars.

The communication discipline is not alone in wanting to collaborate with international partners, and few questions about global academic participation and professional involvement have risen as a result of the collapse of the Soviet empire and world transformation (Tishkov et al., 1998). American and West European scholars in diffident disciplines have streamed to Russian universities with enthusiasm to help Russian scholars and students become acquainted with the rules and concepts of free market relationships and the public information that supports them. Despite their enthusiasm and genuine interest, we believe that both American and West European scholars mistakenly identify the collapse of the Soviet Union with the type of freedom and its freedom commonly associated with our public universities and public scholarship. According to Morrison (1997), "Russia is a country in flux, with something of a vacuum created by the departure of the Communist party. There are democratic forces, there are Nationalistic forces, and there are Communist influences at work" (p. 26). As a result, there is uncertainty as

to where the country is heading and how it will get there. Currently, Russia is not a democracy, but appears to be slowly heading in that direction. With this in mind American and European scholars should carefully select their approaches for conducting studies in Russia as well as carefully evaluating what curriculum and discipline information will be most helpful to the Russian people.

Not unexpectedly, both American and Russian scholars experience several problems conducting social research in Russia (Buckley, 1998). First, and probably foremost, are problems of deficient language skills. Most American scholars are not fluent in Russian. Even when Russian students or language specialists who help American scholars conduct their research are very fluent in English and help to translate the questionnaire, American researchers cannot be certain if meanings were translated correctly from English into Russian. Even translators can have difficulty developing a social translation for many concepts we take for granted. Only a limited number of Russian specialists are familiar with American social and communication concepts. Thus, terms that appear to be standard in social science in both countries may differ dramatically.

The second problem revolves around the content of question and response categories. Even if Russian research assistants are trained and used, American scholars tend to examine American principles and content, which may not exist in Russian culture (e.g., Christophel, 1996; Luthans, Welsh, & Rosenkrantz, 1993). Such studies continue despite early recognition that conceptualizations vary by culture (Holt & Keats, 1992). Moreover, wording of questions can raise suspicion among Russian participants who are not accustomed to revealing personal information to a stranger.

Third, most American scholars are not familiar with the life of Russian people. Millhous's (1999) research provides a model for other researchers. Her involvement in the local Russian culture where she collected her data makes her findings especially valuable. Finally, even if the problems of translation, cultural differences, and familiarity with Russians as described above are minimized, simply the process of asking for and receiving information from people in Russia is difficult. Thus, the importance of well-trained interviewers is a necessity, as there is not a strong survey or research culture among respondents. In some cases and contexts, and for some research topics, respondents' cooperation may be in question.

American researchers can assist Russian scholars in establishing communication departments. However, we agree with Tishkov et al. (1998) that much of the education and research methodology should grow naturally from Russian history, its culture, its present day struggles, and its evolving communication practices.

#### What We Know About Communication Practices in Russia

What is known about contemporary communication practices in Russia comes from studies by American professors (most commonly management professors) and American business experts who identify themselves as Russian experts, English translations of studies conducted by Russian psychologists, and a few Russian-American studies conducted by intercultural communication scholars. Although the preponderance of this research and analysis is not specifically about communication, information about communication can be gleaned from the researchers' and writers' descriptions and conclusions.

#### Learning About Russian Communication From Management Studies

Many business initiatives in Russia have been thwarted by its weak legal system, unpredictable economy, and new government structure (Michailova, 2000). These business

opportunities (and many subsequent failures) have resulted in a literature replete with articles documenting the difficulty businesspeople from other cultures have encountered in developing and sustaining business in Russia. Michailova describes the contemporary Russian business environment as predictable chaos, making it difficult for American businesspeople to understand the Russian marketplace. The foundations of those differences are the different national culture as well as the different economic, political, ideological, religious, and social systems. Despite these acknowledged differences, "a number of management models implicitly assume that Western management approaches and techniques can easily be transferred across borders" (Michailova, 2000, p. 99). Embedded within Michailova's explanation is insight for American communication scholars who wish to introduce the communication discipline in its American form to Russia. Communication systems and practices grow from within cultures with idiosyncratic economic, political, ideological, religious, and social systems. We propose that the organizational change literature, which acknowledges that knowledge and practices are contextually embedded, may help in this introduction and transference.

Based on qualitative data collection in five Russian companies with Western participation, Michailova (2000) found four major issues that needed to be considered in planned organizational change. Again, these issues provide insight for communication scholars. First, organizational members' roles, indeed any communicative role, may differ significantly from the Western experience. For example, Russians have difficulty accepting openness as appropriate behavior, which naturally decreases their participation in any change process.

Second, problems associated with translation should not be dismissed simply as problems of translation (Michailova, 2000). Thus, developing common understandings for the change process is difficult. Terms and phrases common to an American management or business

vocabulary are not known in Russia; some that have positive connotations in America have negative connotations in Russia (Welsh & Swerdlow, 1992). The two cultures view time, planning, and control differently—all phenomenon central to change. Third, crafting and communicating a vision is central to the change process. "Since Russian employees are accustomed to a high level of certainty" (Michailova, p. 108), communicating the vision of change is especially important. While American scholars may be more accustomed to allowing participation in the change process, Russian are more comfortable with following a vision or plan that is laid out for them. Fourth, change is a symbolic process that relies on symbols and signals. Although managers' actions and words should be consistent to be effective, "this is even more important in cross-culture settings where people are more sensitive and more careful in observing each other's behavior and interpreting signals" (p. 108). Although Michailova (2000) purports to be reporting on her analysis of the introduction of Westernized organizational change in Russian organizations, we believe that her analyses also provides a structure for communicating about communication in Russia.

Earlier, Luthans, Welsh, and Rosenkrantz (1993), American scholars with expertise in international management, compared the management, communication, human resources, and networking activities of Russian and American managers and found them relatively similar. Management is a particularly interesting context in which to explore intercultural similarities and differences given that Soviet-style management contrasts appreciably to reform-style management practices. Although the popular press regularly reports on the deficiency of Russian managers' skills, there is little empirical evidence to support such a claim. Depending largely on observational strategies to minimize translation problems, Luthans, Welsh, and Rosenkrantz observed managers of a textile mill of 8,000 employees. To focus their observations, the research

team drew a random sample of 66 from the factory's 2,000 managers and 132 of the selected managers' subordinates. The team trained Russian university students to assist with the observations. Essentially Russian managers were observed doing the same basic activities as managers in the U.S., but Russian managers gave more emphasis to traditional management and communication activities and less emphasis to human resources management and networking. While networking activities predicted managers' success, communication activities predicted managers' effectiveness.

We believe that the similarity in Russian and American managers' activity is not the significant finding of this study. Rather, the finding that communication activities and networking, which relies on interpersonal communication, predicted managerial success and effectiveness illuminate a significant and practical result. Such findings provide a path by which the American understanding of the communication discipline can be of most use to Russian scholars and practitioners. Just as the Luthans, Welsh, and Rosenkrantz's research team employed Russian university students as observes, American organizational communication scholars could work with Russian scholars to deploy research studies that help Russian management better understand their workforce. In this scenario, two ends are achieved. One, Russian scholars are re-introduced to social science methodology. Presumably this will lead to capacity building allowing Russian scholars to develop lines of research about Russian business practices without too much American influence. Two, Russian managers receive feedback about their managerial practices as the transformation continues to a competitive market-driven society.

Welsh and Swerdlow (1992) advocate that face-to-face communication in Russia, particularly in organizations, must be examined so that misunderstandings, conflicts, and costly

inefficiency can be avoided. Most companies in Russia that are currently supported by expatriates are looking to replace these employees with Russians at all organizational levels. Yet Russian employees' lack of familiarity with Western principles of leadership and management, and their unfamiliarity with open communication presents challenges (Cooley, 1997). For years, Soviet employees worked under a system in which to talk and ask questions was to invite trouble. Consequently, many Russians are hesitant to ask for help, take the initiative, or admit being confused (Cooley, 1997; Welsh & Swerdlow; 1992). Although the concept of employee feedback is practiced with varying degrees of openness in American businesses, the concept is completely foreign to Russian employees.

#### An Agenda For Creating a Communication Community Within Russia

We advocate that Russian scholars be encouraged to develop their own discipline of communication because of the difficulties in translating American terminology and cultural values. Certainly, simple translation from language to another is problematic in all bi-lingual transactions. But the translation difficulties from American English to Russian and vice versa are particular problematic. For example, American use of the word "communication" refers to all forms of communication—intrapersonal to public, mediated communication, informal to formal communication. In Russian, communication refers to satellite and telephone communication, as well as transportation routes.

The values embedded in the two language systems also cause translation difficulties. Zatsepina and Rodriguez (1999) revealed how differently Russian students responded to 13 central American values. Russian university students were most critical of Americans' value of change, the control of time, individualism and privacy, positive aspects of competition, and future orientation—all values embedded within American communication practices. Similar and

additional differences have also been documented (Aksenova & Beadle, 1999; Kartalova, 1996; Tongren & Hecht, 1995). Indeed systematic cultural differences were revealed by Millhous's study of Russian-American groups. The two cultures differed significantly with regard to instrumental and relational communication. Americans favored the former; Russians favored the latter. Also significant, the interviews revealed that participants expected to have difficulties in their collaborations because Russia was a unique context in which American approaches did not apply (a view more widely held by Russians than Americans), and because Russia was behind the United States and deficient in market mechanisms (a view held by twice as many Americans as Russians). Most troubling to potential Russian and American collaboration is that Americans and Russians suffer from a tendency to believe that all American things are good and should be of use to Russians. Such a lopsided notion must be discredited if meaningful intercultural dialogue and intercultural collaboration is to exist.

Perhaps, yes, Russian scholars can speed through the development and testing of some communication principles that Western scholars have repeatedly tested. But if they were to do so, what might we lose? Millhous (1999) suggested that external influences on intercultural groups were the most dramatic. Although Gudykunst, Chua, and Gray (1987) suggest that cultural dissimilarities become less dramatic as relationships among interactants develop, we believe that Millhous's identification of external influences as especially critical. Indeed, culture is "a feature of the societal location of the work group as well as an internal feature of the individual and a process of interaction" (p. 301). Despite the abilities of members of an intercultural group to create their own internal culture and climate over a period of time, groups do not operate in a vacuum. Every group is situated within a cultural context that is more likely singular than plural.

Who better to help us understand the external influences of Russian culture on communication practices than Russian scholars? Again returning to our argument--our job as Western scholars is to help Russian scholars build the capacity to design and conduct their own research without too much of Western interference. Emphasizing cultural differences in communication style and practice, Beebe, Kharcheva, and Kharcheva (1998) suggest that partnerships should be developed among American and Russian educators to interpret Western communication principles for Russian needs and to interpret Russian communication principles for non-Russian scholars. "The goal . . . should not be to promote a Western or the United States' research or educational agenda. The aim of collaboration should be mutual understanding and enrichment" (p. 271).

Could faculty exchanges help, as suggested by Beebe, Kharcheva, and Kharcheva (1998)? Yes, but only to the degree that American scholars visit and learn about Russian communication practices in Russia. Given that the numbers of Russian scholars who speak English are far greater than the number of American scholars who speak Russian, such exchanges may well produce uneven cultural understanding. Beebe, Kharcheva, and Kharcheva also suggest research consortiums and collaborations. In what ways could these be helpful? Comparative studies are one way to promote the growth of communication as a discipline in Russia. But American scholars need to be careful of over imposing their research methods or conceptualizations and operationalizations of communication phenomena. Clearly, not all communication practices and principles operate equally in both cultures. Comparative studies must also have as their objective of going beyond simple descriptive comparisons. The several management and business comparative studies (Elenkov, 1998) demonstrate that direct transferability of American concepts to Russia is fallible. The goal of comparative research

should be to go beyond the identification of differences to the illumination of Russian concepts. And, certainly, the goal of such research should not be the application of American approaches.

### The Future

Although the communication discipline does not exist in formal coursework or defined as a discipline in Russia, Russian scholars have investigated communication variables in a variety of disciplines. Scholars in sociology, psychology, linguistics, journalism, business, and public opinion research have all contributed to Russian investigations of communication phenomena (Beebe, Kharcheva, & Kharcheva, 1998). Our analysis of electronic databases indicates that Russian scholars tangentially study communication when they examine the psychology of young children, dysfunctional families, or space crews, or risks associated with disease (especially HIV/AIDS). Family, group, and health communication scholars should investigating tapping into these existing lines of Russian research.

Organizational communication scholars may be able to integrate their research with that of American management scholars, especially since many of the "management" issues appear to be communication related. Russian electronic search showed that there is a growing area in business studies that looks at ethics in business communication (Anderson, 1997; Averyanov, 1987; Klobukova, et al., 1997; Phirsov, 2000; Slivkin, 2000; Vrish, 1999). However, these studies address mostly questions of negotiation skill training. In addition, the majority of these studies look at Russian-American negotiation or American business ethics. What Russian business communication scholars are missing is analysis of communication changes within Russian organizations in the light of the broader economic, social, and cultural changes.

We challenge American communication scholars who want to assist Russian scholars in the development of *their* communication discipline to heed the advice Martin and Nakayama

(1999) provide about competing perspectives in the study of communication and culture. Despite our motivation to do good, and the belief that we are doing good, even the spread of discipline information, pedagogy, and methodological expertise is laden with metatheoretical assumptions.

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